

Noriega Case

Former Director Of CIA Speaks Here, Predicts Plea Bargaining Arrangement

By Charlene Prost
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Stansfield Turner, a former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, predicted Sunday that the U.S. government's attempt to prosecute ousted Panamanian leader Manuel Antonio Noriega would end up in plea bargaining.

Turner said he suspected the bargaining would result because of the complexity of the case against Noriega and the "potential embarrassment" to the government if Noriega were brought to trial and testified about his past connections with the CIA.

As part of the plea-bargaining process, he said, Noriega could provide the government with information it wants about the operation of the drug cartels. Noriega has been indicted in Florida on charges of smuggling marijuana into the United States and making more than \$4 million by facilitating the shipment of cocaine from Colombia through Panama to the United States.

Turner was in St. Louis on Sunday to give the January commencement address to about 950 graduates at the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

He urged the graduates to continue to learn and to set goals for accomplishments in the years ahead.

And, he said, "We have a great challenge ahead of us now as a nation" in light of changes under way in many European countries.

"We must ensure that our society is a model for the world that is turning toward democracy as communism collapses," he said.

In an interview before the address, Turner said that Noriega was not employed by the CIA during Turner's term as director, which was from 1977 to 1981, during the administration of President Jimmy Carter. Turner said Noriega worked for the CIA before Turner's service and, again, after his term ended.

Turner said that while Noriega was a CIA informer before 1977, he was also spying on the United States by getting information from U.S. military "sergeants" he had on his payroll. After the government learned of that arrangement, he said, Noriega was dismissed from the CIA.

But when the administration of Ronald Reagan took over, he said, "They brought him back, knowing about that" background.

Turner said Noriega has information that should be secret and could be damaging and other information that would be "embarrassing" to the government.

"He would have truly secret information, such as the names of CIA agents, ways we collect information, and on whom," he said.

Noriega knows also how much he was paid by the CIA, and the extent of his involvement with drug smuggling while he was employed by the CIA. "That information would be embarrassing, but not critical to the country's security," he said.

Turner said that "the worst thing that could happen would be that he would get off scot-free."

He said there is at least a 30 percent chance Noriega could go free if Noriega goes to trial because of legal complexities that could arise in prosecuting the case. For example, Turner asked, "Is it legal to snatch a person from his own country and bring him here for trial?"

Turner said that he was both "surprised and distressed" that the United States invaded Panama. And he said the invasion should stir some serious thought about America's course with regard to other countries.

"There are over 100 other countries in the world that are not democracies," he said. "Where will this stop?"

He said he thinks it would be a mistake to allow American troops that invaded Panama to remain there for many months. He said animosities could arise because of the United States' role as an "occupying force."

"And we have got to have the friendship of the Panamanian people to run the canal," he said.

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